REMARKS ON ‘STYDYING FOSSIL HORSES’

In 1981, the American Museum of Natural History invited a group of Horse specialists at a "New York International Hipparion Conference" with many purposes. One of them was to bring together for the duration of the conference original interesting specimens, in particular skulls, dispersed through various collections, and make casts of them.

Another was to initiate an international cooperation on a subject much too vast to be dealt by any isolated specialist. This implied that the specialists would agree to use the same methodology for observations and measurements of *Hipparion* fossils, in order to share their data. Since I have been observing and measuring *Equus* and *Hipparion* for ca. 10 years, my methodology (elaborated from Gromova's after discussions with C. De Giuli and P. Sondaar) was proposed as a basis for discussion. Naturally enough, the final recommended methodology turned out to be quite different of my basis: it had now to include new characters such as the observation and measures of the Pre-Orbital Fossa (POF), the measures of the lateral digits, and other features. But a number of my measures were also suppressed, or slightly modified, and the whole numerotation was changed.

For me it was a disaster. After ten years of practice, I had to shift to an altogether different system, which, moreover, I did not find really satisfying. After the conference, I worked some months with the new system but eventually I had to compromise with my ancient way. The result was an awful mess... Eventually, I came back to it when studying *Equus*.

Other important purposes were to study the normal specific variability of an homogeneous sample and to see how big were the differences between the measures taken by each participant, thus to test the new system. In order to do so, we were invited to study a sample of skulls from Christmas Quarry (Xmas Q.) considered as belonging to a single species - *Cormohipparion occidentale*.

It became soon evident to some of us that there were two skull morphs under the same name (Eisenmann et al. 1987), which was unfortunate because the species had been defined on tooth characters which were identical in both.

The publication project included two volumes: 1. Methodology; 2. Study of a normal specific variation and of bias induced by the various present specialists.

Both were to be published by the American Museum. To make a long story short, the second volume was never published, and the first was eventually published in 1988 by Brill (after many peripeties including the loss in America of the prepared drawings).

On the whole, however, the conference was a success: the new methodology was, and still is, in use among *Hipparion* specialists. The opportunity given to all of us to know each other better and to study otherwise inaccessible fossils was wonderful, as well as the kindness and generosity of our hosts and the extraordinary experience of Morris Skinner.